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ABSTRACT

Several Institutions are investigating appropriate ways to meet the needs of those traditional aged (17 through 22 years) students who desire the experience of residential living. The purpose of this paper is to identify those elements of residential living that have proven beneficial in creating a meaningful college experience for students. The literature on the impact of residential living on students is reviewed. It is concluded that the variables of the goals and values of the institution and the needs and desires of the particular students are the most important determinants of the impact of residential programs on students. It is suggested that a variety of residential programs focusing on the variable of time and the needs of different student populations, i.e., minority students, have yet to be tested. (Author/JMF)

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THE EFFECTS OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS ON STUDENTS

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THE EFFECTS OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS ON STUDENTS

Residential living on American college campuses has generally referred to structures, e.g. dormitories. Most people have perceived residential living as a necessary but distinct function from the central academic purposes of a college community. Thirty six percent of all physical facilities on American college campuses serve residential purposes (Population Characteristics, 1973). The influx of students into higher education recently, among other things, encouraged many four year and some two year colleges to initiate residential building programs. Mamouth residential areas such as the Southwest Residential College at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst* represent the result. In 1966, twenty nine percent (1.8 million) of all full-time students in higher education were being housed on campus (Population Characteristics, 1973). The number of residential students in 1971 remained near 1.8 million, but it represented only twenty three percent of the total full-time student population (Population Characteristics, 1973). Hence, those colleges and universities which focused on the structural aspects of residential living, anticipated continued growth in student numbers, and built new facilities in response, may be facing a problem of underuse of residential facilities currently. Other factors have contributed to the current problems of residential living, i.e. student desires to live off campus and an increased commuter population, but it is clear that the recent history

*Southwest Residential College houses over 5,000 students and includes both high and low rise dormitories.

of residential living has created a problem of how to entice and retain student interest in on-campus living.

The purpose of this paper is not to suggest solutions to the current mileau of problems in residential living, but to summarize the conclusions educators have drawn from the past research and attempt to apply those conclusions to development of new programs in residential education. Several institutions such as Empire State College are now investigating appropriate ways to meet the needs of those traditional aged* students who desire the experience of residential living. In short, the purpose of this paper is to identify those elements of residential living that have proven beneficial in creating a meaningful college experience for students.

The methodology will consist of a review and analysis of the literature. First, the general characteristics of traditional aged students who participate in residential programs will be discussed. Secondly, the general impacts of residential living upon undergraduate students will be reviewed. Third, we will focus on those programs that have attempted to coordinate living and learning experiences. Finally, some conclusions from the literature will be summarized and an analysis will be provided.

Characteristics of Residential Students

The type of student who lives in on-campus housing is often reflected in the nature, location, and rules of the college or university. Most colleges and universities have residential programs by necessity. The number of students who choose to live

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*Traditional aged is herein defined as seventeen through twenty two years of age.

in on-campus housing is unknown. Therefore, the characteristics of residential students defined by literature may reflect more the student population of a particular type of college than characteristics related to residence.

George (1971) suggests that residential students have a greater need than other students for agression and change. The socioeconomic backgrounds of resident students tend to be higher than other students. In short, George (1971) suggests that socioeconomic status, autonomy, dominance, change and agression provide the strongest predictors of whether a student might choose to live on campus as opposed to living off campus or commuting.

Other researchers have contributed to our knowledge of residential students in more specific categories, i.e. sex, vocational interests and major fields of study. For example, Astin (1971) found that women are more likely than men to live on campus. Schroeder and LeMay (1972) summarized some of the major research in coeducational housing and found that students who choose to live in coed housing tend to be more mature, flexible and more able to develop interpersonal relations.

General Effects of College Residence on Students

The characteristics of students who choose to live on campus are closely related to the outcomes of the residential experience. The desire of a student to live on campus indicates a likelihood that the student has a favorable impression of the college environment (Williams and Reilley, 1972). Living on campus seems to enhance positive perceptions of self and the college environment.

Astin (1971) suggests that residential living increases the chances a student will be satisfied with the undergraduate experience, particularly with fellow students and faculty.

Williams and Reilley (1972, p. 406), referring to Duvall's (1969) research at Indiana, indicate that favorable impressions of self and the environment are related to the amount of time a student spends in residence. "It is important to note that student leaders in the halls, freshmen, and students who had lived in the halls only a short time tended to respond in a more favorable manner than did upperclassmen in general and those students who preferred to live off-campus."

Residential living apparently has a positive effect on achievement motivation. Some researchers have discovered a significantly higher grade point average among residential students than among students residing at home or off-campus (Hountas and Brandt, 1970). Astin (1971, p. 206) found significant differences in other areas as well. "Dormitory residents were less likely to drop out and more likely than commuters to attain the baccalaureate in four years, to apply for admissions to graduate school, and to earn a high grade point average."

The variety of arrangements a student encounters within a residential experience appear to have varying impacts on students. Roomate arrangements are one category. Williams and Reilley (1972) suggest that satisfaction with one's roomate has a direct relationship to one's satisfaction with the college experience. Roomates enrolled in the same course tend to mutually enhance their academic achievement (Williams and Reilley, 1972).

The presence of high achieving students tends to have a positive influence on the academic achievement of other students. Academic achievement is enhanced if high achieving students are placed in close proximity of each other (Williams and Reilley, 1972). If high achievers are dispersed throughout the living complex, the achievement of other students seems to be positively influenced (Williams and Reilley, 1972).

Researchers have also found significant impacts of coed and class arrangements within residence halls. For example, Williams and Reilley (1972) report that achievement for freshmen women is higher for those in all-undergraduate dorms than for those in all freshmen dorms. Schoemer and McConnell (1970) report similar findings.

The greatest impact of coed arrangements appears to be on interpersonal and social growth. Astin (1971) found that coed housing stimulates social activity. Coed housing seems to enhance male-female interaction and interpersonal competence in general (Schroeder and LeMay, 1973). Linnell (1972) found students in coed housing to be more mature, have more manners and exibit less tension than other students.

Several researchers have attempted to compare the academic achievement of students living in coed housing with other students. No significant differences have been found. Williams and Reilley (1974) report on a coed program at the University of Nebraska. No significant differences in academic achievement were found, but it was concluded that coed housing provided a "healthy and educational" experience.

Finally, May (1974) suggests that on-campus living is beneficial to disadvantaged students. Such high risk students living on campus were found to achieve at higher levels than high risk students living off campus or at home.

In sum, living on campus tends to have a variety of impacts on students. Generally, residential living has a positive effect upon a student's perception of him/herself and the college environment, seems to enhance motivation, tends to create conditions for improved academic achievement and seems to be beneficial for the disadvantaged student. Various living arrangements, i.e. roomates and coed living, seem to have a significant impact on students.

Living-Learning Arrangements

"Living and learning" residential programs have different meanings to different people. Blanchard (1972), for example, considers a specialist in residence for a limited period of time as a living and learning project. The University of Delaware attempts to provide a wide variety of living options on campus for students ranging from traditional dormitories, houses associated with a particular academic department to houses leased by the students (Littlefield and Spencer, 1973). Each option is considered by the university to be a living and learning project. Some colleges make more distinctions than others between traditional on-campus residence and living-learning projects.

The literature on living and learning projects reports substantial impact on student affective growth. Williams and Reilley (1972) suggest that living and learning projects tend to increase

student satisfaction with faculty and more rapidly increase the cultural sophistication and aesthetic values of students. The perserverance and motivation of students in living and learning residence programs tend to be greater than for other students (Gordon, 1974).

Students at the University of Delaware living and learning projects were apparently more satisfied with faculty, believed the campus atmosphere to be more scholarly and cut class less frequently than other students (Pemberton, 1969). There were also fewer drop outs among living-learning students than among other students.

Brown (1972) reported on the Nebraska Centennial project at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Students in that project tended to be from the humanities and focused on contemporary and personal issues of interest for programs. The Nebraska Centennial project was found to have a positive impact on creating a greater sense of community, improving student-faculty relationships and improving student-student interaction. "The program did have a positive impact on the students' academic styles and intellectual orientations.... (It also helped create) changes in intellectual attitude but not in intellectual skills (Brown, 1972, p. 199)."

As with coed housing, research on living and learning projects seems to report a positive impact on student affect, but no significant differences in student cognitive achievement. Living and learning programs tend to improve a student's academic and

cultural perceptions, whereas, coed housing tends to have an impact on interpersonal relationships. Although there is no common definition of "living and learning", the various types of learning programs in residence halls seem to have a positive impact on student perceptions and affective growth.

Conclusions and Analysis

There are a variety of elements in on-campus housing that are appealing and beneficial to certain types of students. "Residence halls may provide optimum experiences for some types of students, but certainly not for all students (Williams and Reilley, 1972, p. 408)."

Different residential programs tend to attract students with different needs (Schroeder and LeMay, 1973). No single residential program seems to be appropriate for all students desiring a residential experience.

Chase and Wolosin (1972) identify a need for "independence" as a choice factor for those students choosing to live off-campus. Structure (Gifford, 1974), affiliation, and convenience are a few of the needs students may seek to fulfill through residential living. Students at Empire State College, for example, may be expressing a need for affiliation since they seldom come in contact with fellow students.

Residential programs tend to have an impact upon both student academic achievement and their interpersonal skills. Students living on campus tend to have higher grade point averages than commuters or students living off-campus (Clements, 1969). Coed housing apparently has the greatest impact on interpersonal skills.

A report from the University of Maryland (1971) suggests that coed housing results in more "spirit" and greater enjoyment. Littlefield and Spencer (1973) report that students who participate in coed residential programs tend to participate more in group activities, seem to be more satisfied with their college experience, and tend to form meaningful relationships other than sexual.

To summarize the impacts of college and university housing on students one must consider the elements of the particular environment. The nature of the college or university, the needs and desires of students, the type of living arrangements and the goals of the housing program, i.e. living and learning, all must be considered when determining the impact of residential living on students. These are also important when attempting to develop residential programs appropriate for a particular college environment.

Although the research into the impact of on-campus housing on students is helpful, it has several limitations. First, most of the research has been done on freshmen students (Williams and Reilley, 1972). Residential living may have a different effect on upperclass students than on freshmen. Current research is not adequate to determine the relative impact of residential programs on different age (academic standing toward graduation) levels.

Research has tended to be cross-sectional rather than longitudinal in nature.* Cross-sectional research may reflect prior characteristics and choice factors of students more than

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*Cross-sectional refers to research performed at one particular point in time. Longitudinal studies examine a group of students with a common element of potential influence over a period of time.

the impact of residential living on students. The required nature of residential living on many college campuses limits student choice factors and also tends to limit research on the impact of residential programs on students.

There are two particularly important limitations to the current literature on residential living. The first limitation is the lack of research on the impact of residential programs on minority students. There has been little or no research published on the impact of living arrangements, academic programs, or special ethnic and cultural programs for minority students in residence areas of colleges and universities.

The second limitation is the lack of research on varying time commitments of students to residential programs. Are short-term residential programs more effective as Williams and Reilley (1972) seem to be suggesting? Is residential living as effective for one term as for several terms? These and other questions regarding the time variable suggest the need for further research.

Research into living and learning programs also seems to be limited. The major limitation in analyzing the effectiveness of living and learning programs appears to be a need to further isolate the particular variables which have the greatest impact on students. For example, (partially due to a lack of definition of what living and learning programs refer to) it is difficult to tell whether student interaction around a particular academic focus, student-faculty interaction or the integration of learning and living have equal or differing impacts. Suggestions for further research into living and learning programs should also include the effectiveness of

the various ways to coordinate living and learning programs with other academic programs of the student and comparisons of the effectiveness of living and learning programs using different academic focuses, i.e. interdisciplinary concerns or concentration on specific courses of study.

In summary, residential living represents a significant concern of American higher education. Students who participate in residential programs, whether by choice or requirement, tend to differ from other students in academic achievement and interpersonal skills. It is difficult to suggest that these differences can be attributed to the impact of residential living on students rather than prior characteristics and desires of students. Residential programs appear to be beneficial to some students and a variety of residential programs and living arrangements have been developed to meet a variety of student needs. It appears that residential programs can be beneficial in meeting student learning and interpersonal needs as well as simply providing the student a place to live, but the residential program must be tailored to the specific needs of the students and be consistent with the goals and values of the institution.

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